



News Release

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Gonorrhea counts climb 40 percent in Washington in 2014

OLYMPIA — The annual number of gonorrhea cases diagnosed in Washington rose significantly again in 2014, according to recently released state data. There were 6,136 cases in 2014, compared to 4,395 cases in 2013 – a jump of almost 40 percent. The latest increase follows a 33 percent increase from 2012 to 2013.

Rates of infection in Washington have been rising from a 2009 low of 34 cases per 100,000 people to a rate of 88 cases per 100,000 people in 2014. Despite this recent rise, Washington gonorrhea rates remain below national figures. State and local health officials have yet to learn why the number of infections keeps climbing.

“The continued increase in cases is concerning,” said Zandt Bryan, infectious disease coordinator for the department. “We’re working closely with local health partners to monitor the situation, and to share information about the importance of routine screening, getting exposed partners treated quickly, and the need to practice safe sex.”

Increases in gonorrhea diagnoses have been seen in men and women of various age groups, but young adults continue to be the most affected. Most counties around the state saw an increase in cases of the disease. However, some have seen bigger spikes. Clark, Kitsap, Snohomish, Yakima, Grant, and Spokane counties all experienced outbreaks during 2014.

Gonorrhea is the second most common sexually transmitted disease in the state after chlamydia. The disease is spread through unprotected sex with an infected partner. The infection often has no symptoms, particularly among women. If symptoms are present, they may include discharge or painful urination. Serious long-term health issues can occur if the disease isn’t treated, including pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, and increased chances of HIV transmission. State health officials encourage anyone diagnosed with gonorrhea to be tested for

— More —

HIV. Men who have sex with men who are diagnosed with gonorrhea are recommended to consider getting HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

Local and state public health workers are working with health care professionals to ensure that people with gonorrhea and their sexual partners get appropriate testing and treatment to stop ongoing spread of the disease. Gonorrhea can cause infections in the genitals, rectum and throat. Health care providers should test all of these sites for disease, especially for men who have sex with men. The department also recommends that health care providers offer expedited partner therapy (EPT) medication to heterosexual patients. This ensures sex partners are treated quickly and avoids reinfection. Drugs that are currently available are effective against the disease, but gonorrhea can become resistant to medications.

The Department of Health urges anyone who is experiencing symptoms, or has a partner that has been diagnosed, to be tested. Sexually active individuals with multiple partners are encouraged to have routine screenings. Prevention methods include consistent and correct use of condoms, prompt treatment of partners, mutual monogamy, and abstinence.

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